

November
1999

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

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GOD REMEMBERS

BRIEF PRAYERS ON NEWS ITEMS

Sonia C. Solomonson

Don't feel helpless when you hear news stories. Make a habit of praying for people and concerns as you learn of them in the news.

WINDS IN TENNESSEE

Christ Lutheran Church of Clarksville, Tenn., was declared a disaster last year. No, a tornado did not rip through Clarksville. But its pastor, David Hood, says subtle currents gradually eroded the ministry as they do in many congregations: Attendance slipped, offerings declined, and vision suffocated. This year the congregation officially restarted in a service that challenged members to "Listen—God is Calling."

May we be open to new directions, Spirit of Restlessness and Change.

CALIFORNIA WEIGH-IN

Christ Lutheran Church in Visalia, Calif., hit on a novel approach to gather food for a local food pantry. Nearly 800 of its members celebrated Christ's 38th anniversary as

a congregation by gathering their weight in food. On delivery day, the congregation had gathered 40,000 pounds plus \$4,000 in cash that was converted into more food, totaling 66,069 pounds.

Thank you for rich imaginations for ministry, Loving God.

CHILDREN WORSHIP IN PENNSYLVANIA

First English Lutheran Church in Butler, Pa., celebrated a Mukula Mass, a service created in Finland that allows children to experience worship using more of their senses. The service follows traditional Lutheran liturgy but adds a "prayer walk," a time when everyone visits prayer centers throughout the sanctuary. The centers are created by families, individuals, and Sunday school classes. The worship offered a thanksgiving center, intercessory prayer center, blessing of families at the altar, and an art table where prayers could be drawn.

Remind us that Jesus urged us to be like children, O God. LWT

Sonia C. Solomonson is managing editor of The Lutheran.

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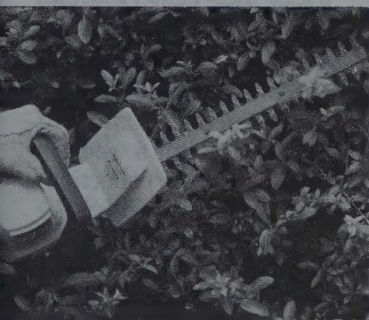
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Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writers and, except for the Women of the ELCA department and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of the Women of the ELCA.

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A remembering people

Cotton Fite



Early March is still late winter in Chicago, but the day we pruned the shrubs in Jim's oriental garden was warm and promising. Before he died in January, my wife had promised Jim she would perform the ritual pruning of the garden he loved so much.

Jim's widow, Pat, joined us, and we spent the better part of an afternoon performing a ritual of remembrance. Sometime before we stopped for tea and scones, I burst out laughing at the image of Jim observing my labor and, with a wry smile, saying, "No, no, no, Cotton, not like that. You'd better stick to collecting the debris." Pruning is my wife's expertise, not mine.

How much we missed Jim, and how grateful we were for his continuing presence in our lives. Tears mixed with grateful laughter as we remembered someone we loved and who loved us.

Jim Ashbrook was a pastor, scholar, and teacher. He was fascinated by the explosion of research in neuroscience and spent years studying the implications of brain research for religion. He realized that the function of memory was critical for meaning-making and the nurturing of the soul. "We become who we are," he wrote, "by remembering what we know. Without personal memory, life is empty, meaningless, random. Memory is the basis of meaning. In meaning we are able to connect various aspects of experience. We stabilize our world. We expand our experience. We find our soul."* Jim gave new meaning to the concept of "soul" as he linked (but did not limit) it to a neurophysiological process. Soul is given as poten-

*We become
who we
are by
remembering
what we
know.*

* James B. Ashbrook, "Brain Processes and Pastoral Counseling," *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 1996, vol. 50, no. 2, p. 144.

***Memory
is the
basis of
meaning.***

tial in our creation and grows as we accumulate, integrate, and draw meaning from our experience.

The practical lesson from Jim's writing is that we ought not neglect our souls. As the pace of life quickens and a flood of information threatens to drown us, we run the risk of missing the personal markers that make sense of our existence. So much is going on that we have difficulty distinguishing the significant from the trivial. As Christians, we are a "remembering" people, commissioned to remember the gracious acts of a loving God and to celebrate the faithfulness of those who have shown us the way. And we remember best through rituals, those patterned actions that weave meaning into our lives and souls.

The parish I attend has begun a wonderfully rich tradition of celebrating All Souls' Day (November 2) with an elaborate Sunday evening requiem Eucharist. In the week before the liturgy, parishioners are invited to place objects that remind them of departed loved ones on an altar. By Sunday night the altar and surrounding tables are filled to overflowing with pictures and books and flowers and

personal mementos. It reminds me of altars I saw in rural Mexico crowded with holy objects placed there by scores of the faithful. But in this case the holy objects represented the people we cherished. This year I brought pictures of my wonderful one-armed grandfather and of two male mentors who guided me into adulthood. I brought a woolly sheep from the collection of a dear departed colleague and a bouquet for another who regularly decorated our office with wild flowers from her backyard. Standing in front of that altar, the "communion of saints" take on a new and more immediate meaning.

With liturgies like these we are learning to remember the grace that flowed through the lives of our loved ones. But there is another kind of remembering we need to learn to do before we, too, are among those departed. I was reminded of it recently when a colleague asked me how I had come to my vocations as priest and psychologist, and she seemed genuinely interested. I found myself telling her the story of the significant people and events that, woven together, constitute the substance of my soul. She remained patient and attentive, encouraging me

to continue. The events were not all positive. Some represented personal failures and betrayals that were very painful. But grace flowed through all of them, and the remembering let me sample them all again. My soul was nurtured, and I felt a profound sense of gratitude.

When my father was still alive and in his early 80s, he and my mother came to visit for Christmas. Although he was not a very talkative man, I persuaded him to tell me stories about his younger years, and he seemed to warm to the task. I tape-recorded several hours of stories—many funny, some sad and poignant, all meaningful. It is an occasion I will always treasure for the unusual intimacy we shared, for the pleasure it brought us both.

When my father was older and Alzheimer's disease had eroded much of his memory, he would repeatedly tell me the story of the time he outsmarted the upstate mayor who was trying to wrangle a bribe out of him in exchange for a vote favorable to my father's company. Alzheimer's had stolen much of his brain, but he continued to remember this story about his integrity and dignity.

Greeting-card manufacturers know about our desire to remember and stay connected with one another. Most of their creations are useful; some are more than a bit contrived. But, for all of the creative efforts, greeting cards can't capture the really significant events that shape our lives. Those events rarely conform to anyone's calendar of occasions. They come when we least expect them, woven together from dynamics we can hardly make sense of, often in times that seem less than noteworthy. They are moments of illumination, of transcendence—when meaning comes together naturally and easily. They are the bits and pieces of experience that, woven into our memory, bring coherence to our existence.

Let's remember to say to one another, as my colleague did, "Tell me about your life." What a gift we offer one another when we invite each other to tell our stories!

Jim was right: It is in the remembering that we nurture our souls. And he was right about another thing. I should let my wife do the pruning, and I should stick to collecting the debris. **LWT**

Cotton Fite is a clinical psychologist and Episcopal priest. He is the director of the Pastoral Counseling Center at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Ill.

Remembering God's gracious love



Elizabeth M. Hunter

I often misplace my keys, only to find them later in a pocket, on top of the table, or in my purse. At other times, I forget what I walked into a room to get or where I put something.

I worry about recalling the names of people I just met, and there are movies that I don't remember watching until we rent them again and they become vaguely familiar ... oh, yeah, I did see this.

How faulty and fragile, how precious, is the gift of memory! How can memories, which help to define our lives, help to sustain our faith? How can we be better "rememberers" of God's gracious love for us?

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT MEMORY?

Memories go from being temporarily held to being permanently held when they are:

- repeated;
- meaningful to our lives;
- emotionally arousing.

Parents remember in loving detail those precious first moments of holding their newborn child. Most Americans over the age of 45 can immediately say where they were when they learned John F. Kennedy was assassinated. This type of memory—called "flashbulb memory" by psychologists—helps to illumine important events, allowing one to recall in detail the circumstances surrounding those events.

MAKE A FLASHBULB MEMORY OF GRACE IN YOUR LIFE

My grandparents had a unique way of remembering God's good graciousness in blessing them with a total of 11 children and grandchildren. Although they lived many miles away from all but three of us, they remembered us all on birthdays, anniversaries, and other special days by lighting a candle and praying for us. At the bottom of every card or note, one of them would write familiar words: "We will light a candle and pray for you today." Even as a child, I felt comforted and loved to know that they were praying for me. When visits to our grandparents fell on someone else's special day, we were included in the celebration—the lighting of the candle, the prayers that accompanied morning devotions.

Here are some simple ideas that can help you illumine God's good graciousness for your life.

Sticky blessings. Write on separate sticky notes several ways God has blessed you, recently or in the past. Scatter the notes around the house, placing them in areas where they will frequently come to your attention (refrigerator, bathroom mirror, com-

puter monitor, door, light switch). Hide a few notes in places where you may find them later ... when you least expect it.

Spiritual scrapbook.

In a scrapbook, collect faith memories—confirmation photos, stories of a time when God made a difference in your life, and symbols or tokens that remind you of God's faithfulness. Add to the book as you continue to travel on your faith journey.

Memory quilt. Make a memory quilt that reminds you of God's goodness, with favorite Bible verses or phrases that have special meaning for you. Add color and variety by alternating words with pieces of cloth that have transferred-on photos of loved ones.

Audio or video record.

Using a tape recorder or video camera, ask friends or family members to tell you about their most memorable experience of God's love. For example, was there a time when receiving communion was especially meaningful for them? Share the footage with members of another generation.

Show-and-tell. Look for something in your house that God "made" (a houseplant, frost on the window, the family cat). Have a

family “show-and-tell,” seeing how amazing the creations are. Think about our amazing Creator-God.

Cookbook. Compile a cookbook with recipes from friends, relatives, and neighbors. With each recipe, ask contributors to share a brief story or memory about their faith. For extra flavor, add colorful photos or doodles.

Notecard ministry. Remember God’s love for you by passing it on. Surprise someone by placing a brief, kind note in the mail, in a child’s lunch, or in the luggage of a family member when he or she is traveling.

A reminder of God’s love. Carry a cross, a bit of rainbow-colored ribbon, a favorite Bible verse on a 3 x 5 card, whatever, in your pocket or wallet. Give one to a friend.

Key-date reminders. Remember important dates in the lives of those around you—recognizing not only traditional celebrations but also such “cardless” occasions as an anniversary of a death or divorce. It may be just as important—perhaps even more so—for someone to hear your encouragement during those tough times.

First things first. Let prayer be your first act in the morning ... and your

last at the end of the day. Don’t put it off. Consider “praying the Psalms,” a discipline suggested by Martin Luther, by concentrating on the words of a psalm as you read it, allowing it to come alive and live in your heart. See Ephesians 5:18b-19 for inspiration.

A blessings list. Remember that God showed compassion and did not forget Noah and his family. Make a list of the blessings God has given you to help you persevere in your faith.

Music reminders. Think about what you like best about God. Can you find a song that expresses these things? Sing or write down the words.

And so on. Add to this list an idea of your own to help you remember the gracious love that God freely gives to you—and to all of us. **LWT**



Elizabeth M. Hunter is a section editor for The Lutheran and former editor

of Seeds for the Parish. She and her husband, Leslie, are members of Holy Family Lutheran in Chicago.

Living the “Deuteronomy 6” life

More than memories

Valora Starr Butler

The art of remembering is as passé as quilting by hand or cooking from scratch. Who has time—and why bother? Memories are instant these days. Vacations, graduations, weddings, even births can be recorded with camcorders the size of your hand. Pictures can be taken and stored on CD Roms—no need for bulky scrapbooks.

In contrast, the generations before us had nothing but the memories. People spent quality time remembering in detail experiences of the past. I love hearing stories about “back in the days.” The story always starts out with the words “I remember it like it was yesterday.” Stories told with care for every detail, nothing left out—and there is never a short version! The memory-teller seems to be almost right there as the story is being recounted. And soon the story comes alive, and all who listen are reliving the story. We are the story.

I wondered why it is that I cannot “sit still and do nothing”—until I traced back my memories to my maternal grandmother. Grandma Betty was a farmer by day and “church lady” all the time. She sat with the sick, fed the hungry, consoled the grief-stricken, and prayed without ceasing. I learned to “keep working for the kingdom” through the stories I heard from her, and continue to hear.

I’ve heard and relived these stories until they have become a part of who I am. I have become the story, and I live it.

I realized that remembering the stories is exactly what God has charged us to do in Deuteronomy 6. Read the chapter, and see how we have been charged to remember and teach the great commandment: “so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear [love] the LORD your God all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 6:1-2a). So that we will live as God’s



*(Grandma)
Betty and
(Grandpa)
Edward
Lyons Sr.*

people, with God's ways, and live long lives. God has promised.

And what is it we are to remember? "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). And so the many stories of my grandma's faithfulness help me to know what to remember, relive, and pass on.

***Deut. 6
calls for a
"revival" of
the stories.***

Grandma's life was more than "teaching by example." Her stories of "back in the days" took the guesswork out of what I was to gain from these examples. Deuteronomy 6 calls for a "revival" of the stories—recite them, talk about them, take them to heart, and write them down. Do it often: at home, on vacation, on the way to hockey practice or to piano lessons. Teach them when you get up in the morning, and when you go to bed at night. Post them on the refrigerator door and on the dashboard of your car.

Remembering what God has done for us and how God is active in our lives requires us to experience God's works—much the same way we must experience Walt Disney World before we can remember life in the "Magic Kingdom."® Without the real experience, it's like telling about someone else's vacation or trying to relive a wedding you did not attend. God is calling us to be in relationship and to tell others how wonderful our relationship with God is.

Living the "Deuteronomy 6" life is not some ancient thing. It is one of the most intimate, personal, and religious memories of God's present people.

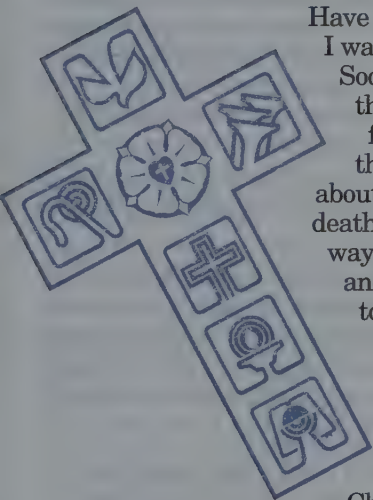
Our children, and new Christians, must hear the stories to make their own memories. We must rely on God's Word and prayer in making new rememberings.

I hope that all of the "Auntie Val" stories of "back in the day" will cause "my children and their children" to know that I love the LORD my God with all my heart and all my soul and with all my might. And that God is indeed active in my life and, just like Grandma Betty, I am always busy—working for the kingdom! **[W]**

Valora Starr Butler is director of stewardship for Women of the ELCA.

To be remembered

Paul R. Nelson



Have you ever thought, "How do I want to be remembered?"

Sooner or later all of us face the fact that we will not live forever. We usually cherish the hope that people we care about will remember us after our death. Asking this question is a way of evaluating our behavior and priorities today. If we hope to be remembered as a kind person, for example, we must behave kindly.

The Christian church remembers and celebrates individual

Christians in its calendar of "Lesser Festivals and Commemorations" (see *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pp. 10-12). These days are set apart by the church to remember Christians for some aspect of their faith and life that is instructive, enlightening, or encouraging for Christians living today. Francis of Assisi (October 4), Mary, the mother of our Lord (August 15), and Johann Sebastian Bach, Heinrich Schütz, and George Frederick Handel (July 28) are some of the Christians we remember in this way.

November 1 is a special day for remembrance. On this Festival of All Saints, many congregations remember not only the individuals named in the church calendar but all the baptized who now rest in Christ. This is a good day to recall the lives of congregational members who died since the last All Saints' Day. The prayers of intercession during Holy Communion often list these people by name. Some congregations even solemnly toll their church bell(s) during the reading of these names as a way to remember. When November 1 does not fall on a

Sunday, many congregations celebrate it on the closest Sunday after that date. We remember the departed saints for their contributions to the church's witness, not for their personal worthiness.

Christians today remember in a variety of ways. We remember by thinking: We recall things and people in our past that have been important to us. We remember by *doing*: We perform tasks in the way that our mother taught us first to do them. Each time we do these things we remember her and our feelings for her. We remember by *willing*: In our "last will and testament" we make bequests to family, friends, and cherished institutions to show that we remember them and will that they continue to remember us. We remember by *praying*: recalling in private prayer or in public worship those who have died in faith.

Perhaps a more important question for us than how we would like to be remembered is how Jesus would like to be remembered. We do not have to engage in imagination about this. We do not have to wonder "what would Jesus do" about this question. The scriptures provide us with a very specific answer. Saint Paul writes:

"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

In the celebration of Holy Communion the church remembers by thinking, praying, and doing. We follow Jesus' last will and testament by remembering Jesus as he asked to be remembered, by doing certain things: taking a loaf of bread together, giving thanks to God, breaking it and sharing it, and hearing the pastor speak Christ's words to us again: "This is my body that is for you"; taking a cup of wine, thanking God, sharing it and hearing the pastor speak Christ's words: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." Jesus himself asks all of us to "Do this in remembrance of me."

The kind of remembrance that happens when Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper is not merely calling past events and dead persons into our memory as an idea. Rather, doing these things together calls on God to make Christ really present among us in the sacrament. This is different from the various private ways in which we remember Jesus: looking at an image of him in a painting or sculpture, hanging a crucifix or cross in our homes and churches, reading and telling the stories of his life from the Bible. In the Lord's Supper we make a public remembrance of his saving life. In this celebration we have a special promise from Christ himself to be present with us.

Is it too often to remember Christ in this way every week? From the earliest days of the Christian Church (Acts 2:46-47a) we know that "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people." This "breaking of bread" was apparently a common meal that included the Lord's Supper. The ELCA statement on sacramental practices, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, encourages congregations to celebrate the sacrament each Sunday and festival:

"The Church celebrates the Holy Communion frequently because the Church needs the sacrament, the means by which the Church's fellowship is established and its mission as the baptized people of God is nourished and sustained.... All of our congregations are encouraged to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, but not every service need be a Eucharist."*

We do not have to wonder how Jesus would like to be remembered. He has told us clearly. **LWT**

Paul R. Nelson is director for worship in the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries.

* *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament.* Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997. Augsburg Fortress order number 08066-3648-3, \$4.95. Call 800-328-4648 to order.



Honey

God remembers the animals

Julie B. Sevig

At a communications seminar that featured slide after slide of advertising layouts, the speaker said, "If you really want to sell a product, add a dog to the picture." Then he proceeded to show us exactly how many companies do that very thing, including those that sell chairs, cars, and colas. I'd offer the same advice if I were giving a seminar—not on communications, but on life. If you want to really be sold on life, add a dog. Or a cat. Or a horse. Or a bunny. Whatever creature suits you.

Perhaps that's why I am overcome with a new appreciation for God when I read the flood story, the creation text, or the references Jesus makes to the value of even a sparrow. God remembers the animals (check out Genesis 8:1). To God, they are not "just animals." Anyone who has said a tearful goodbye to a faithful animal companion knows the sting of that phrase. God cares for the animals. Now that's my kind of God!

I was well into adulthood before I realized how fortunate I was to have parents who passed on a love and respect for animals. I remember my mother telling me about her dog and my dad's story about his horse. Their stories of childhood pets and farm animals shaped me more than I realized. Like many members of my family, we traveled through some fairly predictable pet stages, namely: fish, rabbits, and hamsters.

But what I am most thankful for is that we had a dog—a great giver of unconditional love.

Buffy—part terrier, part Chihuahua—was both "artsy" and "outdoorsy." The artist came out when she hit some high notes while dancing in circles on her hind legs. She also spent countless hours chasing chipmunks, never catching one in her 13 summers of trying at our lake cottage. She was nothing if not persistent. Buffy was our family's dog, but my brother Paul and I liked to say she belonged specifically to the two of us. We argued endlessly about who owned which end. Buffy saw me through my adolescent years and then some. She sent



Murphy

me off to college and welcomed me and my dirty laundry back home, saving her bones to hide in piles of clean laundry. Buffy was laid to rest in the corner of the backyard at my parents' last parsonage.

Spuds, a cock-a-poo, was my dog—a companion through my young adult years. He was filled with much love, loyalty, and playfulness. He found all the floor-level dog treats on Easter morning as if he were in a competitive Easter-egg hunt. Although favoring his poodle ancestry more than his cocker side, Spuds loved to be outside. He was no “foo-foo” dog. Spuds was laid to rest in the backyard at our family's lake home. His death made me wonder if I could find a place in my heart for another dog.

But now there is Murphy—like Spuds, an extrovert to my introvert. His cocker-pug combination makes him a conversation-starter with everyone. Murphy nuzzled his way into my heart after a difficult time in my life. He has been my healer.

Honey, who occasionally comes sauntering to the door when I call, “Honey, I'm home,” has been my escort into the cat world. She has taken me from a fear of cats—or at least a

lack of appreciation—to true love. She helps me remember the important things in life: sleeping and eating, sometimes in reverse order. Honey has her own version of Ecclesiastes 3:5b, “a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.” Honey believes there is a time to be close (usually on top of the newspaper I'm reading), and a time for independence. She is, after all, a cat.

Animals, whether domesticated or wild, remind us of God's creativity, attention to detail, and insistence on diversity. A marvelous God brought the creatures of the water, air, and land into existence. And they were so important to God that when the flood came, God saved them, too. Created, named, and saved. Hmmm. Sound familiar? God knew that not only would Noah and his family have a future, but so would the animals.

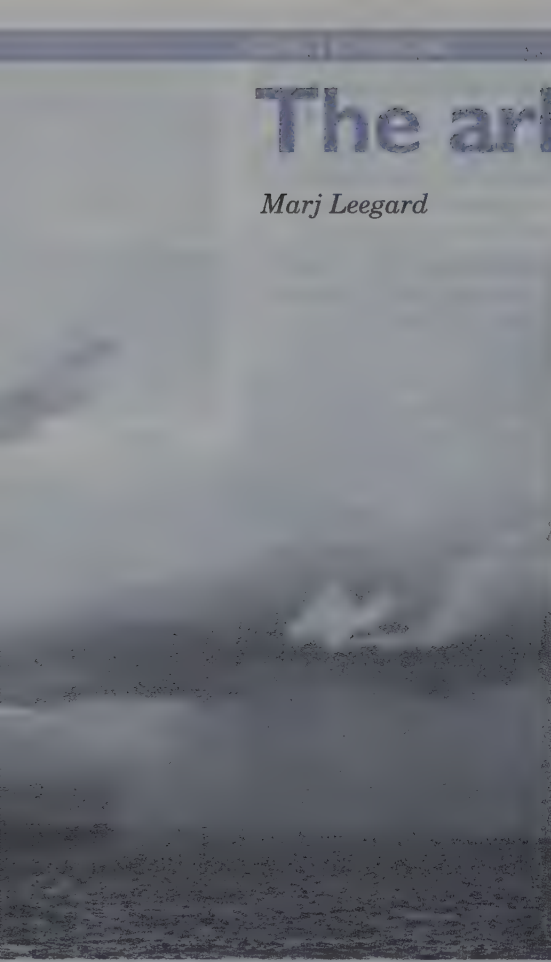
God gifted the world—and us—with creatures for beauty, our livelihood, and companionship. Let us imitate God by remembering the animals. Can we do anything less? **LAW**



Julie B. Sevig is associate director for resources in the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries. She's a member of Ebenezer Lutheran in Chicago.

The ark of faith

Marj Leegard



Who hasn't wished for an ark—a place of safety and comfort? A place planned by God? We all have moments when we know exactly who and what we'd want banished to the outside of our ark, under God's rain of punishment. And in our need we want an ark right now—unlike Noah's ark, which took time to build. Yet, under God's design, we, too, are building an ark—an ark for our lives, even if it isn't easy to see all the planks along the way.

Bernice wasn't thinking of an ark when, in her mother's arms, she came for baptism. Bernice was the “first blend” in a blended family. When her parents married, her father had two daughters

of his own, and her mother had two daughters. Tiny Bernice united sisters with sisters, and parent with parent. She was related to all of them! Pastor Smeby used the words and water to give her a much larger family. And there was room in the ark for everyone!

Noah built his ark on dry land under cloudless sky. Bernice built her life as her father's fishing pal and competent helper in their store. When the time came, she went off to confirmation class. It didn't seem like an ark of refuge. Her mother bought her a white dress, and they had a big family gathering on confirmation day. That part of the ark was finished.

Bernice taught Sunday school, attended worship, and went roller-skating, where she met Norman. Her plans

changed when she overheard her father say, "When Bernice leaves, I will have to sell the store." She decided to quit school and stay home to help her dad while Norman went into the army during World War II. The waiting was difficult and the work hard. They were buying scrap iron as part of the war effort. People were not sure that this wisp of a girl knew anything about scrap iron. And then the rains came: Her father died on Christmas morning and Bernice began to understand the ark of faith that God had made for her. Plank by plank, the ark was forming—and the ark held!

Norman remained safe in the Pacific, but he had to stay in the Philippines another year after the war with his bomb-disposal unit. Finally, he came home and he and Bernice were married and moved to a farm on the north side of Height of Land lake. They lived there for 14 years, had three sons, and planned to spend the rest of their lives there. But the rains came for them and for their neighbors. The land was needed for a wildlife refuge. They had no choice.

They bought a farm near the Buffalo River and moved their dairy operation and their church affiliation and began again. It was difficult to start over. Now they were in a new neighborhood, living in the garage while they built a house. Plank by plank, they established a home again.

Bernice wondered how Noah felt when the rains kept falling. For Noah and his family, water flooded the world for 40 days and 40 nights.

Water covered the land to the tops of the mountains. And for Bernice, the rains came again. Norman's health failed and he could no longer milk cows. Without dairy operations the farm was not viable. They moved to the shores of Strawberry Lake. Life now revolves around trips for dialysis. The boys and their families come to fish and feast on homemade rolls.

Bernice and Norman attend circle and Women of the ELCA meetings together because both men and women enjoy the gatherings. They worship together. The ark of refuge that God assembled from Bernice's baptism through Sunday school and confirmation and the everyday life of marriage and family still holds, however much it rains.

It may seem peculiar to receive instructions to build an ark on dry ground under a clear sky, but the alternative—building and hammering and sloshing about under a deluge—is difficult, bordering on impossible.

So we follow God's plan, and God has given us wonderful planks for our faith refuge. In Christ God provides that rainbow of promise. We are safe! And so we carry our babies to baptism, and take our children to Sunday school and confirmation classes. We worship together. We listen together to God's plan for our arks of faithful refuge. **LWT**

LWT columnist Marj Leegard is a member of Bakke-Lund-Richwood parish in Detroit Lakes, Minn. Marj's 25 favorite columns appear in her book, Give Us This Day.

From division to diversity

Wyvetta Bullock

Our challenge is to live out our God-given diversity and unity.

Our humanity is a gift from God, and so is our human diversity. In the first article of the Apostles' Creed, Christians confess that God created heaven and earth and in that confession we affirm our God-given unity in creation.

Our interdependence is a global reality that goes back to the beginning of recorded history. In the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11:1-9, all the people of the earth shared a common language. As people migrated from the east and settled in southern Mesopotamia, they decided to build a city. The story states that they wanted to make a name for themselves and secure their place in one location. God was not pleased with this action and intervened by "confusing" their language and scattering them across the planet. The Babel story is one attempt to explain the diversity of language and culture throughout the world.

Many generations after this story was written, St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that Christians are one in Christ Jesus. Although there are diverse gifts, each person is needed for Christ's body to be whole. St. Paul pointed out that alone, isolated from the gifts of others, Christians are not all that God calls them to be.

We live in a multicultural world. The diversity of language, skin color, religious faith, national origin, social order, and worldview are our reality. To isolate ourselves from those whose gifts are different from ours is to cut ourselves off from part of ourselves. God has inextricably linked all of creation. Our challenge is to live out our God-given diversity and unity. Through the reciprocity of giving and receiving each other's gifts, we encounter more of God and more of ourselves.

Speaking a common language in itself does not unite us. Having a different skin color in itself does not divide us. We decide to accept or reject each other. God made us one multicultural, multicolor, multilanguage human race.

To move from isolation and participate faithfully in a multicultural world requires an openness to God and to God's creation. It requires attention to at least three things: **respect, reciprocity, and reconciliation.**

To live faithfully with God's diverse creation, we need to respect each other. An American Indian friend once told me that it is dangerous to assume that difference is demonic and not of God. Our survival on planet earth greatly depends on our respect for each human life and all of God's creation.

I grew up as a pastor's kid in eastern Tennessee during the time when segregation was legal. I had ample opportunity to believe that something was wrong with me because of my skin color. My parents taught me early in life that "no one is better than I am," and that "I am no better than anyone else." They taught me to **respect** all of humanity.

One of the organizing principles of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is interdependence. This understanding of partnership is woven throughout the expressions of our church. The assumption

is that living faithfully in our diverse church requires **reciprocity**. So it is with living faithfully in a diverse world. It is important not to trivialize or discount the gifts of other cultures. A faithful exchange of gifts is necessary for real partnership and to avoid paternalism.

I am not advocating that we worship another culture or our own. We live in a world broken by sin. No culture is exempt from this reality. Therefore, let us be careful not to idolize or demonize any culture, skin color, language, or national origin.

God sent Jesus to redeem all of creation. God's gift of **reconciliation** in Christ is especially needed in order to live faithfully in multicultural relationships. God's gift of forgiveness in Jesus Christ reconciled us to God and made room for us to be reconciled to each other. This gift provides hope for all of us to move from isolation. Whether in our homes, local communities, work places, congregations, or some remote part of the global village, God has given us in Christ what we need to live reconciled lives in a multicultural world. **LWT**



The Rev. Wyvetta Bullock is executive director for the Division for Congregational Ministries and a pastoral associate with Bethel Lutheran Church in Chicago, Ill.

Splish, splash, trickle, drip

Kathy J. Magnus



The Bible is filled with stories of little-known women. Of all the unsung Bible women, one of the most unsung is Noah's wife. She must have been remarkable. Reread her story from Genesis 5-7. Think about it. Put yourself in her sandals!

Noah was more than 500 years old when "Mrs. Noah" bore their three sons! The boys grew up and got married and then one day Noah came home and told his wife that God was planning to destroy all creatures of the earth and that Noah was to begin construction on a large boat 50 cubits by 30 cubits. Do you suppose she just smiled and said, "Yes, of course, dear," as she served him his lamb stew that evening? Was she thinking that maybe the dear man was getting just a touch senile?

As she watched the ark being built, did she rub old Noah's sore shoulders in the evening and tend his wounded feelings as the neighbors scoffed at his project? When Noah told her to get their things together and prepare to board the *S.S. Noah*, what did she take with her? What does one pack for a voyage of uncertain length, knowing that your traveling companions are going to be your husband, three sons, three daughters-in-law, and a zoo of animals? What about food for her family, assuming that Noah was stocking everything from birdseed to field corn for the animals?

In Genesis 7:11 we are told the rains began on February 17 (if we literally play out the 17th day of the second month). It poured for 40 days and 40 nights. That means it rained day and night, hour in and hour out, until almost the end of March. About a year later, say on February 27 the following year, the water receded enough for them to leave that creaky vessel.

How had the four couples lived in such close proximity? Were they still speaking to each other? How bad did that old ark smell after 375 days of elephants, tigers, and bears? What was it Mrs. Noah missed most from her life before the flood? Her friends? Her garden? Her kitchen?

Noah's family left the ark and immediately built an altar and praised God. God responded with a promise for Noah, Mrs. Noah, and their children: "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth ... When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature" (Genesis 9:11,16). Water changed Mrs. Noah's life. It trickled, dripped, splashed, and poured into her life.

Water. The very substance of life. Awesome, powerful, soothing, terrifying water. Did you know that there is the same amount of water on the earth's surface today as there was "in the beginning" ... that water covers three-quarters of the earth's surface ... that every day 1 trillion tons of water evaporates from the surface of the earth ... that your body is 60 percent water?

I grew up on a lake in central Minnesota. If I close my eyes, I can conjure up childhood days of swimsuits, rubber goggles, clam and snail shells, reeds, minnows, sand castles, pails, and water bugs. I can smell wet sand and ripe, wild strawberries. I'm overcome by the sweet, carefree memory of the water in that place.

As an adult I find it soul-healing to hear and feel the crashing rhythm of waves. I've been privileged to wash babies' faces; to wipe the brow of my mother-in-law with cool water as we sat in vigil around her deathbed earlier this year; to splash barefoot in puddles with a giggling grandson; to turn my face toward the heavens and catch raindrops on my tongue during a warm summer rain. Splish, splash, trickle, drip. Life-giving and restoring droplets, every one. Mrs. Noah had a privilege of not only witnessing the awesome power of God in water, but also hearing God's promise for life.

We have Bible water stories of the ark, Jonah, the Red Sea, the Nile, the Sea of Galilee, and the River Jordan. And sometimes on Sunday we see water poured from shells, pitchers, or a pastor's hand. With these

***Water
changed
Mrs. Noah's
life.***

**Baptism
... the
awesome
gift of
life.**

powerful words, "Dear Child, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," water splishes, splashes, and drips over our heads in the most awesome promise God makes. Dear child, welcome to God's family. It washes over us in splashes and trickles. It is the awesome gift of life. It changes our lives.

Mrs. Noah lived in the deluge of flood water. She came through the waters by praising God. We live amid splishes, splashes, trickles, drips, and sometimes floods. Our daily-ness doesn't include sharing a boat with a hippopotamus, but the burdens sometimes seem as great. Remembering our baptism, let us be women who lift our faces to the heavens every day, catching the promise lavishly, and praising God for water, life, and promise. Then, with our faces damp with the water of baptism, may we be courageous women of faith in the challenges and opportunities of our own lives—letting the water of baptism change our lives.

A favorite hymn eloquently says it all:

Like survivors of the flood,

Like walkers thru the sea,

Like walkers thru the God-divided sea:

*We are rescued, we are claimed,
we are loved and we are named.*

We are baptized! I am baptized!

*We have passed through the waters,
And that's all that matters!*

*We have passed through the waters!
O thanks be to God! * [AWT]*

Kathy J. Magnus is the associate director for International Personnel in the Division for Global Mission of the ELCA. She and her husband, Richard, are members at Our Savior's Lutheran in Arlington Heights, Ill.

* "We have Passed Through the Waters," by Richard Avery and Donald Marsh, is published in *Songs for a New Creation* (Augsburg, 1982, pp. 30-31).

LWT Bible study survey results

Almost 10,000 readers completed and returned the short survey on Lutheran Woman Today Bible studies that appeared in the March 1999 Women of the ELCA IdeaNet. A random sample of these responses were sent for data entry. As you look over the results, remember that reader surveys are not statistically “scientific,” so think of the results as *indicating trends* instead of giving answers. Thanks so much for responding to the survey. The survey results, and the many notes and comments that came in with the surveys, will help LWT and Women of the ELCA meet the needs of Bible study participants. Special thanks to Kathryn Sime, ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation, for her work on the survey. —ED.

1. Check the statement that best describes you.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 92.8% | I most often do the Bible study in Lutheran Woman Today (LWT) in a group, such as a circle. |
| 5.7 | I most often do the Bible study in LWT on my own, not as part of a group. |
| 1.5 | I rarely, or never, do the Bible study in LWT. (<i>Please skip to question 6.</i>) |

2. How often do you lead an LWT Bible study session?

- | | |
|-------|-----------|
| 13.9% | Never |
| 8.4 | Rarely |
| 50.5 | Sometimes |
| 27.2 | Often |

3. Check those resources that you regularly or occasionally use during the course of an LWT Bible study, and indicate how important these resources are to you. (*Note: All percents for question 3 are percentages of total respondents, not just of those who responded to each item.*)

Percentage of respondents who regularly or occasionally use these resources	Resource	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
43.0%	Bible study Resource Book	55.9%	26.4%	4.6%
43.8	Bible study Leader Guide	66.4	17.0	3.3
15.4	Bible study Companion Bible	21.8	9.8	22.0
9.8	Bible study introduction video	4.0	14.1	30.7
20.2	Bible study devotional audiotape	8.3	26.9	29.3
34.3	Related articles in LWT	36.4	40.6	3.8

4. Which is the most important factor in your decision whether or not to purchase a Bible study Resource Book or Leader Guide? *Check one.*

24.1%	Cost
66.1	Content
9.8	Other

IdeaNet

November 1999 • Vol. 3, Number 3

For Mission Together

Saying Thanks

I received a card in the mail the other day with a personal note in it. "Thank you for all the hard work you do for Women of the ELCA. Good luck with your studies, too." It was an unexpected gift on a day when I had been feeling overwhelmed and undervalued. It helped me get life back in perspective.

In thanksgiving to God for the blessings we receive, we offer our selves, our time, and our possessions in ministry to and with people. We give of ourselves not because we want to be thanked in return but because it feels good to show our thanks to God. Yet sometimes it also feels really good to be thanked! To be thanked is to be encouraged, and that gift lasts a long time.

We need to look for opportunities to say thanks to women who give of themselves on behalf of people in need. It's a gift we give to them and to God, because in saying thanks, we're also honoring God, in whose name we serve. We can honor one or two women each year at a special event, a mother-daughter banquet, for example. Each year we can lift up different women, so that over time many are thanked. A certificate of appreciation, a gift to Women of the ELCA or a favorite charity in

the person's name, a notice in the worship bulletin or congregational newsletter—all these are ways of expressing thanks. Creative women in the unit might be willing to "roast" the special honorees, for some extra fun.

Or we can take the opportunity to thank *all* women, reminding each one of the ministries we've noticed she has done lately. Imagine sitting at tables and passing around a card for each woman. As the cards go from participant to participant, prayers of thanksgiving for each person and celebration of her gifts for ministry are written. That way, each woman receives several thank-yous, reminders of the gifts she possesses and has given in the name of Jesus Christ.

Lynn Frank is leadership development specialist for Women of the ELCA, past president of the North/West Lower Michigan Synodical Women's Organization, and a third-year student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Readers: See pages 23–26 for the results of the Bible study survey that appeared in the March *IdeaNet*.

PostCard Ideas

Thank-you hearts

Cut hearts from colored paper and write thank-yous to people for the behind-the-scenes tasks they do. Post the hearts on the Women of the ELCA bulletin board or in any high-traffic area in the church. (Another idea would be to hang the hearts on a "thank-you tree.") Each month use a different color for the hearts.

One person can be in charge of collecting the names and writing the thank-yous, or an envelope containing the blank hearts can be attached to the display to give people a chance to express their thanks.

*Charlotte Blumle
Grace Lutheran
Springfield, Ill.*

A surprise guest of honor

One of the ways we thank people who have served so generously is to choose an honored guest whose name is revealed at our annual mother-daughter event. The person is chosen by last year's honored guest and two others who have been honored in the past. Of course the selection is a great secret until the actual presentation.

At the event we tell about the person and why she is being

honored. We then call her forward to receive a corsage and a gift. This year's honoree was presented with a piece of hardanger (openwork embroidery) made especially for her, dated and signed.

*Mitzi Iverson
First Lutheran
St. Helens, Ore.*

In tribute: a garden

To honor our foremothers, the women of St. Mark Lutheran dedicated a small memorial garden landscaped with white azaleas and red perennials and edged with small rocks. The dedication of the garden marked the completion of a five-year project to celebrate the lives, friendship, and community service of the women saints who went before us.

*Dorothy Reed
St. Mark Lutheran
Lacey, Wash.*

Blessed are the quilt makers

Two of our younger members organized a special thank-you for the six women who meet nearly every month to make quilts. The quilts are donated to a number of organizations, including our local hospitals.

The two women asked to be in charge of the plans for the mother-daughter luncheon. At the luncheon the two surprised us by using as tablecloths the quilts we had made (the quilts were covered with clear plastic cloths for protection). They had asked women to bring old hats and small antiques for the table decorations.

The quilt makers were called forward and presented with a plaque in honor of "our beautiful quilts." What a wonderful surprise this ceremony of recognition was!

*Esther Anderson
Benton Lutheran
Crooks, S.D.*

Honoring the "pillars" among us

In recent years during the fall we have invited all members 70 years and older (with their mates) to a special thank-you luncheon and Communion service. We follow up the invitations with a phone call to get people's reservations and see if they will need a ride.

The fellowship hall is decorated with balloons for this festive occasion. Younger members—both men and women—prepare and serve the luncheon. The pastor introduces each of the honored guests, and a corsage or boutonniere is given to those 85 years or older.

We take photos of the honorees, which are hand-delivered the following week.

What a joy to recognize these leaders who have supported the Lord's work so faithfully over the years!

*Mary Ann Clausen
Tucson, Ariz.*

Help wanted

A reader asks: How do other groups deal with the *problems* of saying thanks—for example, the fear that someone will be forgotten, the danger of setting up a "competition" or a process that is perceived as being "too political," the criticism that "we're not in this for the recognition"? Suggestions would be most welcome!

Please send in ideas on this topic by February 1, 2000, to be included in an upcoming issue of *IdeaNet*.

Send all
**Postcard
Ideas**
to

Women of the ELCA IdeaNet
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4189
Email: IdeaNet@elca.org

A note from our new president

Thank You and Please

When I was a child, my mother always taught me to say “please” and “thank you.” I was to make requests politely and remember to show appreciation. In this season of thanksgiving, though, I am reversing the order, saying “thank you” and “please.” I continue to thank you for the exciting and awesome opportunity to serve God through Women of the ELCA as your president, and I plead for your actions to live out our theme.

My favorite Bible passage begins with Romans 8:35: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Our triennium theme, “Live God’s Justice,” challenges us to have vision, to plan, and to act in order to destroy all things that attempt to separate us from the complete love of Christ.

The book of Esther provides an excellent model. First, like Esther, we claim and call together our entire (diverse and inclusive) community. Second, we pray and fast to discern God’s will and ask

for God’s strength and guidance. Only then are we ready to plan our actions.

Living the gospel is a difficult choice. We must put ourselves on the line. The forces of sin working to keep us broken and separated from Christ are well organized, so we are compelled to have a clear purpose for our justice work. Christ has been honest with us about the seriousness of this task, but he also promises to be with us in the midst of the struggle.

So again I say “thank you.” Thank you for the opportunity to labor for justice with you. But I also say “please.” Please make this your personal faith journey, too. Let us pray, plan, and work together as we “live God’s justice.” Let us continue to use Jesus Christ as our perfect role model, partner, and mentor. We will be blessed as together we struggle to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Thanks be to God!

Linda Chinnia

President

Women of the ELCA

IdeaNet

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5. How likely would you be to subscribe to LWT if it did not include a Bible study?

18.9% Very likely

28.9% Likely

52.2% Not likely

6. Does your circle or women's group meet for Bible study in the summer months?

69.0% Yes

30.2 No

0.8 I don't know.

7. LWT is planning two- or three-session Bible studies to appear in the summer issues of the magazine. Topics of upcoming summer studies may include **justice, rest and renewal**, and **healing and caregiving**. *Of the following, please check all that apply.*

25.6% I think that people who do not do the nine-session study in LWT would be interested in participating in a three-session study on one of more of the topics listed above.

13.5 I am not likely to participate in these Bible studies. *(Please skip to question 9.)*

59.5 I am likely to participate in one or more summer studies with my regular Bible study group.

10.3 I am likely to participate in one or more summer studies with a group that comes together only occasionally, or not usually for Bible study.

20.1 I am likely to do these studies on my own.

5.8 I am likely to do these two- or three-session studies at some time other than the summer months.

8. If you are likely to participate in one or more of the summer Bible studies in LWT, please give us feedback on the leader helps for these two- or three-session studies. *Check all that apply.*

14.4% It is important to me that a Leader Guide be available in a form *separate from the magazine*.

67.8 It is acceptable to me to have a Leader Guide *included in LWT*, along with the Bible study session.

10.2 I would purchase a Leader Guide for a summer study.

9. I use the Internet (World Wide Web).

8.4% regularly

13.1 on occasion

78.5 never

10. I would be able to get information off the Internet from a computer. *Check all that apply.*

20.2% at my home.

4.6 at my office.

6.1 at my church.

7.9 at my local library.

7.9 belonging to a friend or family member.

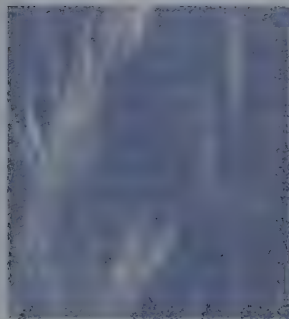
53.2 I do not have Internet access.

7.4 I don't know. **LWT**

In God's Image

A Study of Genesis

Terence E. Fretheim



SESSION 3

God will never do that again!

STUDY TEXTS

Genesis 6:5—9:17; 11:1-9

MEMORY VERSE

“As long as the earth endures, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” (Genesis 8:22)

OVERVIEW

Genesis 6:5 summarizes the nature of the human condition: Human beings are sinful through and through, throughout their entire lives. Genesis 6:11-13 states an effect of that sinfulness: the earth is filled with violence. In view of this situation, God sorrowfully decides to wipe out everything that has been created. But Noah finds favor with God, and God decides to save him, his family, and pairs of every animal.

In the midst of a flood that devastates the entire world, God remembers Noah and all the animals (Genesis 8:1). The flood subsides and dry land appears. Although human beings remain as sinful as ever (Genesis 8:21), God promises to *never again* respond to wickedness by destroying the earth. God sets the rainbow in the heavens as a continuing sign of this promise.

The earth becomes populated once again, but older patterns of sinfulness again become dominant. This sinfulness is evident both in the family (see Genesis 9:20-27) and in the larger community (11:1-9). But God's promise remains: *Never again!*

OPENING

Your heart, O God, is grieved, we know,
By ev'ry evil, ev'ry woe;
Upon your cross-forsaken Son
Our death is laid, and peace is won.

(*Lutheran Book of Worship* 96, stanza 1)

GOD SAVES

The few details about the ark and the animals are not the focal point of this story. The text gives us no information about the plight of the flood victims, nor does it describe the feelings of those who are on the ark. Nobody speaks in this story besides God—not even Noah. We simply do not know very much about ancient floods, let alone this flood. Contemporary claims to have information about the location of Noah's ark, for example, are interesting but unreliable. We will focus on those elements of the story that result in the salvation of those on board the ark, and the way in which God is portrayed. Who is the God of this text? What does God say and do? How does Noah respond?

THE GOD OF THE FLOOD

The portrayal of God in Genesis 6:5-10 is remarkable. We are told of God's grief, regret, decision to judge the world, and mercy. God appears not as an angry tyrant, but as a grieving and pained parent, distressed at these developments in the human race. At the same time, the judgment announced is uncompromising. God initially decides to blot out everyone and everything (6:7). But Noah's faithful walk with God occasions a change in the divine plans. This God can change, too! Noah's faithfulness is evident especially in his obedience (for examples see 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16).

In and through Noah and his family God can begin again. No matter what one's past may look like, new starts for anyone are possible with this God, even in the worst of situations.

1. Read Genesis 6:5-10. Which of the characteristics or responses of God is most surprising, disturbing, or comforting to you? Why?

THE ANIMALS ON THE ARK

God's first command to Noah (6:19-21) is to take two of "every living thing" (animals, birds, and creeping things) into the ark. God's next command (7:1-3) is to take seven pairs of clean animals and birds and a pair of those that are unclean.

People have often wondered about this difference in the number of animals that entered the ark. Was this a change of God's mind? The text doesn't say this. Does the second command supplement the first command? It is not so stated. Does the second command more closely specify the first command? It could be, but the text does not make this clear. Given Noah's sacrifice of clean animals and birds in 8:20, two clean animals obviously would have been insufficient.

Agreement among details is not the point of the story. Such differences do not take away from the basic truths of the Bible about God, human beings, and their relationship.

GOD REMEMBERS

The flood story leads up to Genesis 8:1 and flows away from it. When the flood was raging at its worst, God remembered all those who were on the ark. God is concerned not only about the future of human life but about the future of animals as well. God's concern about the animals is present in many Old Testament texts. For an example, see the promise of God in Isaiah 11:6-9.

God remembers not only at this point in the story, but also later, in connection with the giving of the rainbow (Genesis 9:15-16). (Other examples of God's remembering include

Exodus 2:24, Leviticus 26:42, and Psalm 25:7.) In understanding what it means for God to remember, recall also the Third Commandment and human remembering (see Exodus 20:8).

2. Read Genesis 8:1. What does it mean for you to remember the Sabbath day? Or what does it mean for you to remember the birthday of someone you love?

The opposite of remembering is not necessarily forgetting. God's remembering means that God now acts on behalf of those who are remembered. The means God uses to dry up the waters is the blowing of the wind. This act recalls God's action in Genesis 1:2, which results in the appearance of dry land (see 1:9). We can conclude from the flood story that the creation has begun to fail and that God's action restores it to the way it was in the beginning.

GOD'S PROMISE

3. Read Genesis 8:21-22. How would you summarize God's promise for our day? Think of a time when this promise was reassuring to you.

God recognized that the ground was cursed because of human sin in Genesis 3:17. It did not function as it should (thorns and thistles came up). The snowballing effects of human sin eventually resulted in the flooding of the earth. God's promise not to curse the ground ever again means that human sin will never lead to such a flood-like destruction. The divine blessing and promise now fill the scene.

God's reason for giving this promise is unusual: because human beings are sinful. The flood has not changed the basic

human character. No new people are in view here, only fewer of them! God is the one who has changed. God chooses to relate to a wicked world in a different way. God will never again respond to sin and evil by destroying the earth and its people and animals.

4. Read Genesis 9:1-7. In this new beginning, what similarities do you see with the commands given in Genesis 1:28-30? What difference?

Genesis 1:28-30	Genesis 9:1-7
v 28	v 1, 7
v 29	v 3
	v 4

Do the commands of 9:1-7 still pertain to your life today? Why or why not?

The opening and closing verses of this section (9:1, 7) show that the basic divine relationship to the world is still in place (see the same language in 1:28). Yet this post-flood world is not a return to the Garden of Eden. The human beings are sinful (see 8:21). New divine commands are given in view of that fact. Animals now live in fear and in dread of human violence. The human diet is supplemented with meat, perhaps as a concession in a famine-filled world. The command against eating blood probably has two points of reference. First, it stands as a sharp reminder that the killing of animals must not be taken lightly. Second, eating blood is forbidden because it was understood to contain life given by God, probably because of the pulse (see Leviticus 17:11).


Concern about the shedding of human blood is also evident. Murderers will be directly accountable to God for their deeds (notice that the text does not mention a court system or capital punishment).

THE COVENANT

A covenant is identical to a promise to which one is committed. God's covenant in Genesis 9:8-17 is a public statement to Noah of the promises stated in 8:21-22. Note that the promise pertains to "all flesh." The promise is all-inclusive. It includes both animals and human beings. This promise of God includes the descendants of Noah from all "future generations." This promise of God is unilateral; that is, it is given entirely at the divine initiative. Nothing that Noah or his family did prompts this promise from God.

In making such a promise God has thereby limited the options for dealing with sin and evil in the world. The promise is also unconditional. It will remain in force regardless of what people do and say. This means that God has bound God's own self to this promise; God cannot go back on it. The promise will be as good as God is, and so we can trust in this promise. God will never destroy the earth again.

The rainbow is a sign for God's remembering (see 8:1). When God sees the rainbow among the gathering storm clouds, God will remember. For God to remember is not simply to recall. Remembering has to do with taking action concerning a prior commitment. It is much like the commandment: Remember the Sabbath day. Remembering is most basically not a mental act, but a move to take action with respect to that which is remembered.

 **Read Genesis 9:8-17.** Have you, in the course of your life, understood this covenant to be also with you? If so, what does it mean for you?

THE TOWER OF BABEL

The human failure in the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) is not easy to figure out. Several suggestions have been made. Pride or rebellion may be evident in the effort to build a tower that reaches into the heavens (11:4). Self-centeredness could be seen in the people's effort to secure a name for themselves. A third possibility is more likely. The concern about being scattered (11:4) suggests an effort to secure their own future—to take care of themselves first—in isolation from the rest of the world. This effort could be understood as a failure to obey God's command to "fill the earth" (1:28).

God counters these efforts by confusing the people's language. The result is that they have to scatter and establish separate communities speaking different languages. This move of God might be considered a judgment on their behavior, but its effect is basically positive, for it fulfills God's command to fill the earth and counters our focus on self-preservation.

6. Read Genesis 11:1-9. Do you recognize in our own day the tendency to isolate and protect? Give an example from your own life or the world around you. When isolation happens, what are the gifts and the burdens of that isolation?

LOOKING AHEAD

The next session will begin our study of Abraham and Sarah and an emphasis on God's promises to them and their response. Prepare by reading Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; and 17:15-16, and by learning Genesis 15:6. **LWT**

Terence E. Fretheim is a professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.

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In God's Image is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Address questions and comments to Barbara Hofmaier, director for educational resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

Remembering friends

Readers tell about a friend who made a difference in their life and their faith.



A 2,184-CUP FRIEND

Some people would say that the value of a friendship depends on how long the friendship has lasted, or on the intensity of the involvement. But I think that a friend is measured by how many cups of coffee have been shared together.

My friend Faith is at least a 2,184-cup friend. I figure that in the past 21 years of our friendship, we've gotten together an average of once a week for at least two cups per visit, filled with tea at her house and coffee at mine.

Wherever we meet or whatever we drink, the real nourishment has been a listening ear and an understanding soul. No topic is too big or too insignificant to talk about. One minute the conversation may revolve around the plight of the refugees from Kosovo, and the next minute we may be comparing colors of nail polish. We discuss the Bible as well as Ann Landers, for we see God in the major events as well as the minor events of our lives.

The best thing about Faith is that I can speak to her in confidence and be sure that she will not betray my trust. I hope she feels the same about me. When I say I am ready to kill my husband or disown my kids, Faith knows that my husband, my kids, and even my in-laws are all wonderful people, and she understands that a person just needs to vent now and then. So when I head down to her house with anger steaming from my ears, I know that by the first time the cup is emptied I will be calmed down, and by the time the second cup is emptied I might actually be laughing.

And ultimately, Faith and I are friends because we know that while conversation and friendship can help

most problems, there are at times those crises that require nothing less than divine intervention. We both turn to the Lord for guidance and our parting words are often, "I'll pray for you." What cannot be overcome by coffee and prayer?

*Sally Steinmiller
Walworth, N.Y.*

AN INSPIRATION TO ALL

Unable to walk due to multiple sclerosis, Val became an inspiration to all of her friends. She served her church, St. Paul's Lutheran in Alliance, Ohio, for the past 15 years by coordinating the Prayer Chain. Val's phone-call ministries also helped with Meals on Wheels and the Alliance Christian Women's Club luncheons. Many people only knew her as a voice on the telephone.



For the past five years she could barely raise her hands, but she continued faithfully to be a prayer person. If she knew you or your name, she was praying for you.

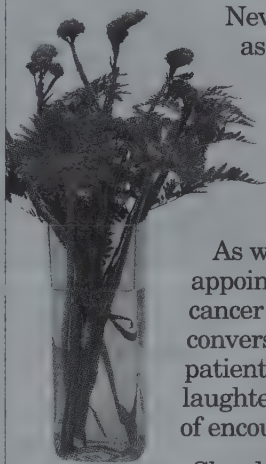
Val taught her many friends to praise the Lord. She was a loyal, faithful, loving, wonderful friend whose weak body has flown home to rest in God and leaves us blessed. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for blessing me with knowing my friend, Val!

*Betty Lou Kee
Minerva, Ohio*

A WOMAN OF HOPE

My best friend has died—it is unbelievable. The family gathering and funeral were a testimony to the fact. So it must be true.

I was privileged to help her family as she went on the journey of chemotherapy, radiation, doctor's appointments, blood tests, MRIs, X-rays, medications, symptom evaluations. Brain cancer has debilitating effects on body organs. For a year we observed the digression.



Never a whimper as the chemo flowed through her veins. Nurses enjoyed working with her.

As we waited for appointments in the cancer center, she conversed with other patients—sharing her laughter and words of encouragement.

She clung to hope when days and nights seemed hopeless. She believed in that which she could not see. We wavered. We questioned. But not her. She knew that faith was "forsaking all, I take Him."

She was not perfect. How we will miss her bossiness! And never will we forget the faith, hope, and love she so willingly shared with us—her family and friends.

*LaVerne Froyland Johnson
Fargo, N.D.*

TEENAGE FRIEND

Sandy was my best friend in junior high. Some 35 years later, I know she contributed to my staying in church at an age when so many young people leave. We had fun in confirmation class. We enjoyed our youth-group meetings. We rarely missed church or Sunday school. She made church a fun place to be. Of course, there were boys, parties, and sleepovers. We spent time at each other's house just being bored.

We went our separate ways sometime during high school. I am not exactly sure when this happened. We had other friends and different classes at school. We kept in touch a little, but never with the same zeal as before.

Now after 30 years we are again keeping in touch through the wonder of email.

It is so good to renew this friendship, even though we

are in different states. We are both still active in our churches. I thank her for supporting me at a critical time in my life just by being my friend. My faith and church involvement have brought me so much joy and support over the years. What a precious gift—faith and friendship.

*Deb Martin
Roscoe, Ill.*

FOR A LIFETIME

Nancy and I met 37 years ago when our husbands were beginning teachers at the same school. God "gave" me Nancy as a friend to strengthen my faith and share life's ups and downs over the years.

Nancy was with me when my father died in an accident 27 years ago, and when I went through an agonizing divorce. We have shared the joys of four children (two each) and now the delights of being grandmothers (seven for her and four for me).

As members of the same circle we have shared many Bible studies and many prayer times. Nancy has taught me so much: God's constant love, the need to love myself, what power there is in prayer, and to believe that each new day is a gift.

Our friendship is built on love, shared faith, humor, our families, church work, and love of people.

(We also throw in lots of talking and shopping, as well as attending our fourth Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention together.)

Thanks be to God for this friend for a lifetime. **LWT**

*Barbara King
Puyallup, Wash.*

Remembering after disaster

Johanna Olson

In Minnesota, after the floods of the Red River in 1997, Lutheran Disaster Response,* in partnership with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, created a day camp for children who are survivors of disaster. The program is called Camp Noah.

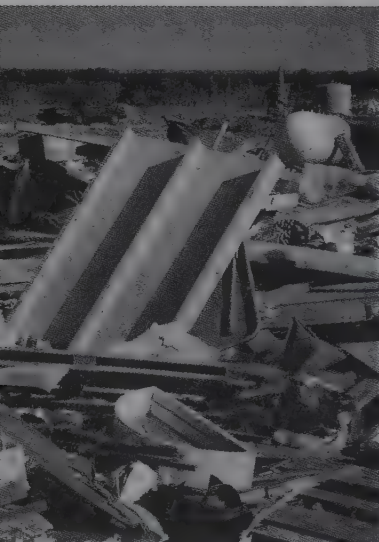
In the course of five days, the children take part in a curriculum that treats Noah and the flood story as a disaster—as a way to help the children in their grieving. For example, day one addresses Noah's preparations after heeding God's warnings. The week ends with Noah finding land and a new home. Likewise, the children are asked to share stories about their new homes. And, like Noah, the children are affirmed by the sign of God's promise—that God will always be with them. (For more information on Camp Noah, call LDR at 800-987-0061.)

ELCA Domestic Disaster Response is called to act on behalf of the church to serve the needs of the most vulnerable of survivors in times of disaster. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:26-27).



Members of Reconciliacion (Levittown, PR), shown here with Francisco Sosa, bishop of the ELCA Caribbean Synod, used their church as a food and water distribution site after Hurricane George.

* LDR is a cooperative ministry of ELCA Domestic Disaster Response in partnership with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.



Lutheran Disaster Response makes a difference in Oklahoma after the devastating 1999 tornadoes.

In speaking of the unique role of the church in disaster, the Rev. Norman Hein, the Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator for Texas, says it well: "The deep human needs and psychological scars left after a disaster require a quality and

measure of care beyond the restoration of physical needs.... Putting one's life back together after a disaster requires real care, hope, and love. Counseling, understanding, and direction are needed to enable persons to cope with their anger, guilt, grief, tests of faith, loneliness, and turmoil. The church is unique in being able to provide care for the whole person."

Caring for the whole person means understanding the broad scope of people's needs, and responding appropriately. To become involved in disaster or emergency response, you must also become involved in "preparedness." As your church develops a preparedness plan for its members, the experience

can become a journey of getting to know each other in new ways, while at the same time serving the community in a meaningful way.

DEVELOPING A PREPAREDNESS PLAN

A preparedness plan can range from handling emergencies in the confines of your church to being active in the larger community in times of a natural disaster.

As you think about preparedness, ask yourself these questions about your church.

- If someone has a medical emergency, are your ushers trained to give CPR? To contact medical emergency assistance?
- Does your church have evacuation procedures for the worship area and other areas of the church, when the building is in use?
- Are emergency phone numbers listed at each phone—clearly, and in large enough type for all ages to read?
- Do you have a ready plan to contact members during or after an emergency?
- What skills are members willing to offer in an emergency?

If a disaster strikes your community, what can you do? Consider these ideas.

- Pray for the survivors and their families, and renew those prayer petitions in the months to follow.
- Survey the halls and large spaces in your church. Could your church serve as an American Red Cross shelter? Or a food-and-water distribution site for the Red Cross? If so, contact your local chapter.
- Later in the recovery period, have your congregation house the volunteers working in the rebuilding efforts. Are there members willing to manage these responsibilities?
- Immediately after a disaster has hit, go on a faith walk with your pastor to the affected areas to show support and a ministry of presence. While on your walk, distribute sandwiches church members have made, along with bottled water.
- Organize a group to help with debris removal, clean-up, and rebuilding.
- Keep in mind the long-term nature of recovery from disaster. Ask

survivors how they are doing. Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota created a curriculum called "Neighbor to Neighbor" through which LSSSD trains volunteers to be peer listeners and advocates for residents experiencing stress as a result of a disaster. (For more information on "Neighbor to Neighbor," call LSSSD at 800-568-2401.)

- Also, those involved with Stephen Lay Ministers, many of whom may already serve in congregations, could apply their skills in assisting disaster survivors. And parish nurses are very helpful in relating to the needs of survivors. (Call 800-987-0061 for more information on parish nurse programs.)

What can your church do for disasters when they strike elsewhere in the country?
You can:

- Pray for the survivors and their families, and keep renewing those prayers.



LDR assists with debris removal after the 1998 floods in Texas.

- Send and encourage cash donations to ELCA Domestic Disaster Response. Money gives us the greatest flexibility in responding to the dynamic and quickly changing needs in an affected area. The money also feeds back into the local economy. You can contribute through Women of the ELCA by writing your check to Women of the ELCA and noting "ELCA Domestic Disaster Response" on the memo line.
- Call us at 800-638-3522, ext. 2822, before your church or women's group initiates a clothing or toy drive to learn what the physical needs in the area actually are.
- Participate in the Church and Society committee in your congregation, and advocate for disaster response; keep raising awareness.
- If volunteers are needed for rebuilding, organize a group to go from your church and arrange a time after they return to debrief with the congregation.

In all your good efforts, remember that Noah did not build the ark and gather the animals by himself. He and his family worked together. Let us continue to work together as family to each other.

LWT

Johanna Olson is assistant director for ELCA Domestic Disaster Response.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Contact ELCA Domestic Disaster Response at 800-638-3522, ext. 2822, or see the Web site at www.elca.org/dcs/disaster.
- Learn how to address Y2K concerns with your preparedness plan. Check out the Web site at www.elca.org/ad2k.
- Learn more about basic preparedness planning from American Red Cross at www.redcross.org/disaster. Find Federal Emergency Management Agency information at www.fema.gov/pte-preparedness.

Changed by a book

Linda Post Bushkofsky



I was driving to the airport one morning, listening to Terry Gross interview author Gail Godwin on National Public Radio's show

"Fresh Air." In talking about her latest novel, Godwin spoke of her slow return to faith. She hadn't been to church in 25 years and wasn't in the habit of praying. But she found herself writing about spiritual people in her novel *Father Melancholy's Daughter*; and she began attending worship services "for research," she said.

She continued to attend worship and she soon realized that she was not just doing research. "It was a form of conversion ... I was changing myself inwardly to be more like my characters ... and at the end of it I emerged changed myself. God and the spiritual life became a daily habit and one I didn't want to break."

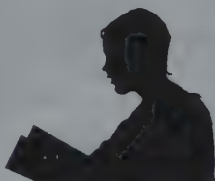
As a reader, I have often found myself changed from reading a book—that's one of the compelling aspects of all art, including books. To think that a writer could be changed—and so significantly—by the actual writing process was a

new idea for me. It makes me wonder. How do you find the Holy Spirit at work in your reading and writing? How are you being converted and transformed? The books reviewed in this issue explore that conversion and transformation theme; they may provide some fodder for your wonderings.

Traveling Mercies

By Anne Lamott,
Pantheon Books,
1999.

Reviewed by
Alison Berger
Boor
Bethlehem, Pa.



Traveling Mercies (subtitled *Some thoughts on Faith*) is a series of personal stories, each of which led Lamott to a revelation about some aspect of Christianity or our relationship with God. Often these stories feature an ordinary situation where any of us could find ourselves, yet the settings are intensely personal and occasionally harrowing—she has not lived an easy life. Her language is occasionally rough, and not all her stories are for the squeamish or overly sensitive; she gives it to us as she sees, hears, tastes it.

Lamott's language is beautiful, almost poetic, and often funny. This is a deeply felt, no-nonsense book that feels like a conversation with the author, who shares every thought and so becomes a very good friend. I found *Traveling Mercies* to be very real—just what I want to read about faith, which can often seem so unreal and be so difficult to relate to my own life.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Can you recall an "ordinary" event where you received an "extraordinary" insight about your relationship with God?
2. What keeps your faith real and down-to-earth?

Evensong

By Gail Godwin.
Ballantine Books,
1999.

Reviewed by Linda
Post Bushkofsky
Bloomington, Minn.



It's Advent 1999 in High Balsam. The season is pregnant with anticipation and fear for that which the new century might bring. We step into the lives of Margaret Bonner, an Episcopal priest serving a parish in the Smoky Mountains, and her husband, Adrian, also an Episcopal priest.

Margaret is a bit like Mary, the mother of our Lord—willing to respond to God's call and open to the possibilities of the season. For Margaret those possibilities take the form of three strangers who come to High Balsam—a female evangelist, an elderly monk, and a troubled boy. The three forever change the life that Margaret and Adrian are building together.

As *Evensong* unfolds and the three Advent visitors become entangled in their lives, Margaret and Adrian struggle with their relationship, exploring how to live out their marriage vows. We see them grow and change through a miscarriage, the death of a mentor, and the com-

plicated lives of the three visitors. In writing a prayer for a marriage ceremony, Margaret recycles words that Adrian had once spoken to her—"may their having each other make more of them both." Margaret muses "that our jobs were making so much of us that we had no time left to make much of each other."

For those who are pastors or are married to them, there are no surprises in this book; it may be an all-too-real mirror of your own lives. For all readers, *Evensong* is an insightful and touching look at a fictional faith community at the close of this century.

The reader might want to read *Father Melancholy's Daughter* first, as *Evensong* continues the story begun there, although it is not necessary.

FOR REFLECTION

1. While traveling on your spiritual journey, how might you prepare yourself to respond to God's call?
2. Think of a relationship of yours in which having each other has made more of you both. How have you sustained that relationship during trying or difficult times?
3. How is your faith community preparing for the new century?

LWT

LWT columnist Linda Post Bushkofsky is associate synod executive for communication and interpretation for Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She and her husband, Dennis, are members of St. Stephen Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn.

LWR Advent Project

Sheila Buttner Law

Driven by famine and drought from her rural home of Saurashtra, India; Santokben, like so many other women and their families, came to the city of Ahmedabad just to survive.

The smoke of the textile mills oozed hope for employment, but in the new city she discovered that without savings the decline into poverty was swift and merciless. Living in a hut with a tin roof, Santokben found herself among thousands of disappointed people who had ended up as slum dwellers. Narrow streets were littered with garbage and open sewers.

About the same time Dominican Sisters were opening St. Mary's Centre nearby to provide alternative employment and hope to women in the depressed area. They offered stitch and embroidery classes, and when Santokben joined, they discovered in her a hidden talent for delicate mirror-work embroidery, part of her culture.

Santokben was a member of a culturally rich tribe called the Kathiawadis. To compensate for the lackluster landscape of the semi-arid wastelands of Saurashtra, they put life and color into their clothing with small flashing mirrors. Their blouses, sprinkled with minute mirrors, flash in the stark sunlight. Even the camels and donkeys proudly move under their vibrantly colored rugs that stand out in the dry desert.

At St. Mary's Centre, Santokben was emerging as a leader among the diverse women who came for training. Often she felt hints of centuries-old rivalries between her



Women in Saurashtra, India, embroider "Khadi" cloth (hand-spun and hand-woven cotton), like the Christmas stockings shown here.

and the others: proud Rajasthanis and independent Kutchis.

Together, however, they discovered a natural bond when they congregated for work. Old squabbles were put aside. Guljan Rafiqbhai, a young Muslim woman, said, "While our culture does not allow us to talk or associate with each other outside St.

Mary's, there we became friends."

The women developed a sense of belonging, not only on a personal level, but on a business level, too. St. Mary's grew to 450 women, and they began producing products for SERRV International, an organization that markets crafts through local churches and provides artisans needed income all over the world.

The women at St. Mary's were gaining economic



Have yourself a fairly traded Christmas

Lutheran World Relief, in partnership with SERRV International, invites you to participate in the LWR Advent Project as a way to benefit low-income artisans from around the world. Here's how it can work.

1. Someone from your Lutheran congregation or women's group volunteers to serve as coordinator of the project.
2. The coordinator calls SERRV International at 800-423-0071 and requests the free LWR Advent Information packet.
3. If you agree to participate, SERRV sends you 10 free copies of the SERRV catalog, featuring all the wonderful, fairly traded arts and crafts from around the world—including embroidered handiwork from St. Mary's Centre in India mentioned in the above article. The project catalogs feature a special cover with information about LWR and SERRV.
4. The coordinator distributes the catalog to 10 people who commit to place an order.
5. Ordering is easy. Each person calls SERRV at the number on the catalog, giving the congregation name and the congregational code (also on the catalog).

independence in a country where the struggle for women's rights was difficult. A colleague, Basumati Dhiraz, told how her membership at St. Mary's helped her through many struggles. "After my husband died, I would have lost my identity, given the stigma that widowhood carries and the superstitions that go with it. But I now had some savings for me and my child and did not have to

be dependent on my in-laws."

Today Santokben earns 36,000 rupees (about \$1000) per year, nearly double what her husband earned in the mills. She is one of the 12 leaders of the advisory board at St. Mary's who makes major decisions. Because of her age and wisdom, she plays a crucial role in her home, in her community, and in the center itself. **LWT**



Sheila Buttner Law is the public relations coordinator of SERRV International and an ELCA associate in ministry.

6. Orders from the catalog may be placed through February 29, 2000. By early April, SERRV will return 10 percent of the total amount ordered by members of the congregation to the congregation. This is a perfect opportunity to do extra-good with the project by donating the amount of this SERRV "rebate" to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. Information about how to do that is part of the information packet. Another 10 percent of the total purchase amount is granted to LWR to cover the costs of the LWR Advent Project.

Creative applications are limitless. Here are just a few ideas:

- Several items could be pre-purchased to sell at your congregation's Christmas bazaar. The catalogs could be on display, too, for additional orders.
- Distribute a catalog to circle or other committee chairpersons. Encourage them to collect orders from their group.
- Think of the people that church groups remember at Christmas. If you're purchasing gifts for homebound members, nursing-home residents, church staff or volunteers, think about ordering through SERRV and the LWR Advent Project.

P.S. The LWR Advent Project is a great example of how our purchases can make a difference. In past years LWT has featured other examples, such as the LWR Coffee (and tea!) Project (call 781-830-0303 or send email to jharper@equalexchange.com for information) and the Women's Bean Project (call 303-292-9072 for information). —ED.



Grants: partners in justice

"So often, those who serve receive as much as those who are served," says Wendy Barcroft, former president of Grace Lutheran Women of the ELCA in Chesapeake, Va. In 1998 her unit received funds from Women of the ELCA's churchwide grants program to begin **HOPE First**—Helping Other People Equip—as a way of supporting the empowerment of low-income women and children. Utilizing the special expertise of women in the congregation, they developed four workshops that are offered to families at a local homeless shelter:

- **Ready, Aim, School!** is facilitated by teachers from the congregation.
- **Nurse Notes** involves nurses in providing health and hygiene information.
- **Money \$tretching** offers meal planning and budgeting.
- **Job Skills** assists with job application and interview skills.

Using some of the grant money, the women have prepared bags of school supplies for the children, health and hygiene kits, household-cleaning kits, and a sample money-management system to be distributed during the workshops. This program is now on its way to becoming a model for other congregations in the community. Says Barcroft, who became the coordinator of HOPE First, "It is wonderful to see the women in our unit come forward and take an active role. It is a blessing to use the gifts God has given each of us in our chosen careers in order to serve others."

Other Women of the ELCA grants recipients, such as the Moscow [Russia] Protestant Chaplaincy's soup kitchen also reflect the dynamic of giving and receiving. ELCA Chaplain Bill Swanson notes that often when volunteers receive assistance from the food-sharing program, "in gratitude they willingly provide volunteer service at the soup kitchens. This models a healthy church—each of us both giving and receiving."

1999 GRANTS

Every year Women of the ELCA financial grants support projects that enhance the development of women and children. They reflect a partnership with women and children who are a witness to us of incredible courage and the strength of the human spirit to overcome adversity. Projects funded in 1999 touch on a broad range of issues, including child care, literacy, domestic

abuse, parenting, family support, and job-and-skill training. Nearly 70 percent of the projects are either sponsored and run directly by Lutheran congregations, women's units, or social service organizations, or they have significant support from coalitions of Lutheran congregations.

FUNDING SOURCES

Women of the ELCA grants come from four distinct sources:

- **The Fund for the Development of Human Resources**, an endowment fund offering assistance to projects that enhance the development of human resources, especially women.
- **The New Ministries Fund**, an endowment fund supporting new or innovative projects that promote justice for women and children.
- **The Women and Children Living in Crisis Designated Gift Fund #528**, funded solely by contributions from participants, supporting projects that empower women facing crisis situations.
- **The India Endowment Funds**, a legacy of predecessor women's organizations, which are used specifically to promote ministries in India, primarily in the geographical area of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church.

GIVING ...

As always, requests for funds have been far greater than the resources available. Your generous contributions will ensure that Women of the ELCA can continue to support the empowerment of women facing poverty and other adversities. Checks may be made payable to Women of the ELCA, noting "Designated Gift Program #528" on the memo line.

... AND RECEIVING

Groups wishing to apply for Women of the ELCA grants may request copies of grants criteria and application forms for the year 2000, which are now available. Applications are due by February 15, 2000. Recipients will be chosen in May and receive funding in June.

Send contributions and requests for grant information to:

Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189

Doris Strieter
Program director

Watch for information on Women of the ELCA Scholarships in the December 1999 issue of LWT.

The miracle of thankfulness

Cora Lee Pless

I am learning to be thankful, and I am learning that thankfulness opens the door to transforming the drudgery of everyday tasks into the privilege of serving God.

Sometimes my children call me away from important tasks because they need my help, or my presence. Thank you, Lord, for children you've entrusted to my care. Thank you for the chance to help them.

I'm often overwhelmed by the myriad details of house-keeping, cleaning, and cooking. Thank you, Lord, that I have people who need me. Thank you for giving me the strength to care for them.

Sometimes I dread the stack of papers and projects on my desk. Thank you, Lord, for the work you've given me to do. Keep me focused and fruitful for you.

Sometimes I'm called to care for my elderly dad. He needs me to drive him somewhere or to attend to some small detail. Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity of serving one of your older saints.

Sometimes I dread the youth-group meeting and begrudge the time it consumes. Thank you, Lord, for these young people and for the opportunity to work with them. Thank you for the energy to almost keep up with them.

Sometimes I have a day when nothing goes right and fatigue overwhelms me. I succumb to frustration, discouragement, and grumbling. Thank you, Lord, for loving me even when I fail. Thank you for loving me even when I grumble. Give me grace to grow in thankfulness to you, and to find joy in the work you call me to do.

I have found that thankfulness frequently comes as a deliberate act of my will before it becomes a feeling in my heart. But, when I make a conscious effort to thank God for the opportunity of daily work, a quiet peace calms me and a ray of joy breaks forth. **LWT**

Let's take the author's example to heart and seize opportunities for thankfulness. Why not begin by jotting down a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of this day? —ED



Cora Lee Pless is a freelance writer in Mooresville, N.C. She and her family are members of St. Mark Lutheran, Mooresville.

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